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heavily up; and shortly about twenty or thirty more spread 224
their huge wings, sailed away, and perched on a neighbouring rock. As for the guanaco, in the short half hour of my absence it had been literally torn to pieces; so, after extracting and eating the marrow-bones, we returned to camp, on our way capturing two armadillos. During the past day or 132
two the temperature had considerably risen; the wind, though westerly, was mild and genial, and the Indians affirmed that farther north it would be so warm that I should require some covering for the head. We found on our return that 005
Ariza during our absence had gone off somewhere on foot. As he had that morning asked and obtained some tobacco from me, it seemed probable that he had determined to attempt to make his way alone to reach civilization at some point or other. During our stay in this valley Casimiro 202
requested me to write a letter for him to the commandante at the Rio Negro, inquiring whether the Argentine Government still allowed him his ration and pay as a lieut.-colonel in their service. I also wrote some letters to my friends, but without much hope of their being 'mailed;' though Casimiro assured me that when we joined the Northern Indians they would forward them to the Araucanos, whence they might go on by the people who went to Rio Negro to fetch the chief's allowance of cattle; remote, however, as were all these contingencies, still it was a pleasure to write. We 133
quitted the valley after three days' rest, during which Ariza had not appeared, and he was concluded either to have fallen a prey to a puma, or to have gone off on his own account. We journeyed all day over a rough hilly country, encumbered with large stones and occasional patches of scrub of considerable height; ostriches abounded, and large quantities of eggs were found. During a long march of about thirty miles no water was seen until we reached the camp at sunset, situated in a ravine; but along the route an occasional patch of snow sufficed to quench our thirst. As I rode along in company 521
with an Indian named 'Tshang,' he began asking me ques-

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tions: first, 'Who is cacique of the English?' I explained to him that it was Her Gracious Majesty. 'Is she married?' 'She is a widow.' 'Has she any children, and how many? Has she lots of horses and mares and silver ornaments?' And so on until I had satisfied him; after which he rode along, repeating, 'A woman cacique! A woman cacique! Four sons and five daughters! Lots of horses, mares, sheep, and cattle!' On the 22nd of September we left the encampment in the cañon about sunrise, and, mounting the ridge on the north side, halted close to the grave of an Indian; the broad and high cairn of stones erected over it denoting him to have been a cacique of importance, which fact was communicated to me in a low whisper by Wáki. Here a fire was made, and a few stones added to the pile. Whilst the Indians were warming themselves the sun rose, and the view of the Cordillera, seen through the clear atmosphere, with the sun's first rays illuminating the snowy mountain summits with a roseate flush was magnificent. We pursued our route over sandy plains, crossed at intervals by shallow streams of water, and halted near some lagoons in a place called by the Indians 'Kinck.'

The following day we marched again, hunting as usual on the way. A fat ostrich at this time of the year was a rarity, but eggs abounded, and formed the main staple of food; and the armadillos were also getting into condition, and assisted to furnish a repast at the camp fire. On the 27th we arrived at a place named 'Gelgel,' situated on the banks of a rapid river, probably that debouching at Port Desire. This was the point of divergence from the northern route to Patagones for any party proceeding to hunt in the western plains. During our stay in Gelgel we hunted in the surrounding country, and on several occasions observed columns of smoke to the south, as if made by a party approaching. These at last appeared nearer, and as no distinct answer was made to our signal fires, scouts were sent out, but returned with no information, one, however, asserting that he had found the

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if I could repair firearms, and one or two very antique specimens of flint pistols and blunderbusses were produced, the locks of which were wood-bound. Half an hour served to set these to rights, at which the owners were much delighted, and offered me tobacco, &c., which however I refused, taking instead a hide to make a small lazo.

After bidding, not adieu, but *au revoir*, to my new friends, whilst strolling back I was called into a toldo where four women were sitting sewing mantles. One, who appeared to be of the Pampa tribe, old and ugly, spoke Spanish, and stated that she was formerly in the Rio Negro with the cacique Chingoli. She acted as spokeswoman for the others, three tall, buxom lasses, daughters of a brother of Quintuhual, who was Capitanejo of the party. They were gaily dressed in variegated ponchos, with silk handkerchiefs bound round their fine glossy hair, which was plaited into two long tails, and set off their clear, fresh complexions charmingly. The first question they asked me was where I came from. On answering, 'From the direction in which the sun rises,' they asked if it wasn't very hot there. They then asked if I had ever been above the sky; if I had not been dead one time and come to life again; whether Casimiro had not been dead and come back again, and various other questions of the same description.

After satisfying their curiosity to the best of my ability, and smoking a pipe, I received a message by Juan Antonio that Quintuhual wanted to see me in his toldo. Proceeding thither, I was shown to a seat on a poncho, and discoursed with the old chief for half an hour; at the end of which he made me a present of a 'jurga,' or, as the Tehuelches term it, 'lechu,' a sort of blanket made by their women, similar to the poncho, except, instead of two parts with an opening for the head to pass through, it consists of an entire piece. It was perfectly new, having been just completed by his daughters.

After a good dinner we adjourned to see the races, a great

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started to hunt, but returned empty-handed. We filled up 484
the skins and water-bottles, in anticipation of entering the 133
travesia the following day; and, after the usual meal and matè, sought out each his own particular nest in the pampa grass, and went to sleep without fear of the horses straying far, the pasture and water being both of the best quality. As it was in this encampment that, according to Casimiro, the defunct Mendoza had discovered gold, I prospected carefully for any signs, but only noticed that parts of the adjoining pampa were strewn, amongst other pebbles, with pieces of quartz. At the usual hour we started to commence the ascent to the travesia, or desert, which rose above us to the north, in a high plateau. On ascending a short distance, we observed on our left hand (to the westward) a [135]
salina of several leagues in length, which bordered the edge of the travesia in about an east or west direction. I am inclined to think that the river Valchita loses itself in this salina. This river is subject to great floods, evidences of which were visible in the drift weeds and rubbish clinging to the bushes and shrubs throughout the valley, evidently left there by the spring inundation. By a gradual ascent we at length reached the level of the plateau, and saw before us an interminable dreary expanse strewn with small shingle, and covered with shrubs varying from four to twelve feet, or even higher, and here and there small tufts of grass. No signs of life were visible. The sky was bright and clear, although clouds were gathering in the southern horizon, and the wind (it nearly always blows in Patagonia) was cutting. I remarked to Luiz Aguirre that it would possibly 521
rain; his reply, 'I hope it will—it will be splendid, then all the lagoons will be full,' told of the danger of drought, but found no assent from me, having had enough of wet weather during the excursion to Las Manzanas. During the ride he told me that he knew the difference between the Catholic and Protestant religions, and of the two he preferred the latter; he also asked me if I had ever been to China, where

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521 the tea came from, and various other questions evincing a considerable amount of information; and wound up by proposing that I should set up a trading establishment near the Chupat; Jackechan—who, if any one can claim it, is the real lord of the soil—having volunteered to cede the ground to me. In the event of establishing a store in that neighbourhood, this astute Indian considered that all the Indian trade would be taken out of the hands of the people of Patagones, who notoriously used false weights, besides charging exorbitantly for all articles supplied to the Indians.

484 About two P.M., as the rough shingle had already begun
133 to tell on our horses' feet, a halting-place was found near a laguna containing rain-water of the colour of *café au lait*. The horses were for the present let loose, to pick up the best meal they could off the stunted grass near the borders of the lagoon. Before dark most of them were tethered, and a careful watch kept all night, lest they should return to Valchita in search of pasture and water. After a lengthened conversation by the fireside—in which I was informed that the track we were travelling was called Pigs' Road, from
[136] wild pigs, or perhaps peccaries, having been killed near one of the lagoons in the route—we wrapped ourselves in our mantles and sheltered ourselves like hedgehogs under the bushes, from time to time getting up to look round for the horses. Next day we rode over the same interminable
137 desert of stones, and bushes of the following descriptions: chañal or whitethorn; picayun, furnishing the best firewood; the osier-like switches before described; black bush, which is useless for burning, owing to the pestiferous smell it emits; algarroba, incense, which are, however, very scarce; and some others whose names I was unable to procure. The chañal is the only one that impedes the traveller's progress, as the thorns are large and sharp. In the other road (more to the west), which we had avoided, although the distance is shorter across the travesia, and therefore more used by the Tehuelches, who dread this crossing, especially in summer